

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 27, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "STRAWBERRY NEWS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today I'm bringing you some news and suggestions from the Department of Agriculture--about one of our modern fruit blessings--the strawberry. I call it a modern blessing because it's been only in about the past hundred years that homemakers have been able to buy strawberries on the market.

Back in 1800, "strawberries for dinner" meant that someone had spent hours in a woodland or a hillside patch gathering wild strawberries. And those were really a rare treat. For there weren't very many wild strawberries--and the season for them was short.

But gradually, as commercial production of strawberries developed--we had more strawberries--and cheaper strawberries--and a longer strawberry season. The opening up of cross-country railroads--and the use of refrigerated cars made it possible to distribute the perishable berries all over the country.

But probably the thing that encouraged strawberry growing more than anything else was the improvement in the strawberry itself. Within the past century, plant breeders have developed a lot of new and better varieties of strawberries. At the bottom of this rapid improvement is an interesting bit of strawberry history.

Our modern berry is the descendant of two good old American strawberry families. For years these families kept to themselves. One lived in the woodlands in the Eastern part of North America. The other grew along the beaches of the Western part of South America.

Early explorers found both of these berries growing wild. They took samples of each back to Europe. There the two strawberry families met. Plant scientists crossed them and produced the forerunner of the strawberries we have today. This particular cross had many characteristics the plant breeders had tried to get for years.

Since that time there have been many improvements of this original combination. Plant breeders have developed strawberry varieties that are adapted to many different soils and climates. Today, strawberries are sweeter, more firm, and larger than they were even twenty years ago. And today we have new varieties developed for special uses. Some make exceptionally good preserves. Others are best for eating raw. Still others are good for preservation by freezing. Future strawberries will be even bigger and better than those of today--if plant breeders reach the goals they've set up for themselves.

5/27/38

And now for the news and suggestions I promised before I lapsed into strawberry history. You know already that so far strawberries have been more plentiful this season than last. Well, the prospects are that the same state of affairs will continue on into July for some parts of the country.

As the areas that produce strawberries early in the season fade out of the picture, other areas farther north come into bearing. And this year in these areas that produce them late in the season there are more acres planted to strawberries than ever.

And here are the suggestions--for buying and washing strawberries. I won't try to tell you how to serve them. Strawberries are so good in themselves they need no fancy fixing. You know of course what even a little bit of heat will do to the fine strawberry flavor. And heat will also destroy the vitamin C for which strawberries are an excellent source.

The other day I talked to a friend of mine who sells strawberries. He says that the appearance of a box of strawberries influences a customer a lot. And that's all right. For good berries don't hide their quality. They look fresh and clean and bright. They have a solid red color. And there's not a lot of dirt--or trash--on them. The caps and stems are on the berries--and both are a bright green.

The poor berries are just as easy to tell. If they weren't mature when they were picked they'll have white spots on them--especially on the tips. If the box is stained a deep red it's a dead give away that the berries are mashed or too ripe. And of course decay or mold on strawberries is easy enough to see if you look down through the box of strawberries.

If you want strawberries to preserve, be sure they are ripe but firm. The recipes read--"use firm-ripe rather than soft-ripe berries." Strawberries of medium uniform size are best for preserving because they will cook quickly.

When you're buying strawberries don't overstock on them. For they are one of the most perishable of all fruits. And wash the berries just before you want to use them. If you want to keep them overnight, pick them over--take out any that are soft and molded--but do not wash them. Then put these berries in a colander or other ventilated container and put them in a refrigerator or a cool place.

Remember when you wash strawberries that they are extremely fragile. Don't let water from the faucet fall on them. Instead rinse the berries up and down in bowls of cold water. Then lift the berries from the water. That way the dirt settles to the bottom and you don't pour it back on the berries again.

Well, that's all the strawberry news today. I'm leaving you with a bowl of freshly washed strawberries. And I'm sure you'll be able to carry on from there to shortcake, and preserves, and a great many other delicious strawberry dishes.
